

Heimo Zobernig at the Austrian Pavilion 2015

The Venice Biennale counts among the most important art exhibitions and is celebrating its 120th anniversary in the summer of 2015.

Austrian Pavilion
La Biennale di Venezia 2015

A look back at the history of artists presented in the Austrian Pavilion so far makes clear the extraordinary breadth and range of the positions displayed there. However, despite the great diversity, the list of participants reads like a retrospective “Who is Who” of the Austrian art scene from the end of the 19th century into the 21st: including, for example, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Oskar Kokoschka, Arnulf Rainer, VALIE EXPORT, Maria Lassnig, and Franz West.

In recent years, through the choice of positions such as those of Hans Schabus, Dorit Margreiter, Markus Schinwald, and Mathias Poledna, conscious emphasis has been placed on positions which have highly differentiated relationships with the media they use, which range from installations through painting to performance and film. In addition to individual presentations, there were a number of group exhibitions of three or more positions and even the usual restriction to Austrian nationality was occasionally abandoned.

For the Austrian Pavilion in 2015, commissioner Yilmaz Dziewior selected Heimo Zobernig, an artist who has not only influenced the art scene in his own country like almost no other, but is also among the most successful positions in international art discourse and exhibitions. Through his professorship at the Academy for Fine Arts in Vienna, where he has taught for the last 14 years, Zobernig continues to influence subsequent generations. His exhibition activities range from repeated participation in major events such as the Biennale di Venezia (1988 & 2001), the documenta in Kassel (1992 & 1997), and Skulptur Projekte Münster (1997) to extensive individual exhibitions in renowned institutions like the Palacio de Velázquez/Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid (2012), Kunsthaus Graz (2013), Mudam Luxembourg, and the Kestnergesellschaft in Hannover (both 2014) – to name just a selection from the last three years.

Heimo Zobernig’s work is marked by its high level of precision in terms of both form and content. He often succeeds in involving the observer both intellectually and sensually at the same time. His spectrum ranges from drawing and painting through installation and sculpture to video and spatial settings of a practical nature. Already in his early years, Heimo Zobernig had a firm grasp of how to question the basic premises of art both critically and playfully, by using the exhibition and/or the catalog or book in itself as a medium of his analytical reflection. In this sense, the individual building

blocks of his art became his actual oeuvre. Hence, he exposes the mechanisms of the art system, addresses hierarchies and examines concepts both for their concrete and metaphorical meanings. All the more impressive is how he succeeds in negotiating these issues in the form of what might almost be called classical, apparently autonomous canvases and sculptures, or by means of concrete architectural interventions and installations.

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Heimo Zobernig will skillfully combine both approaches for the Austrian Pavilion, which is based on a spatial concept by Robert Kramreiter and was built in 1934 by Josef Hoffmann. Both spatial intervention and independent work of art will enter into a combination as equal, reciprocally commentating elements of his Venice contribution. No less than the concrete room, the situation of the Biennale itself is a starting point for Heimo Zobernig's deliberations. How can a meaningful contribution be made in an environment based on nation-state representations and in which each voice competes for the most attention? What effects make sense in such a context? These questions also play a role in Heimo Zobernig's concept for Venice. And the Austrian Pavilion, with its equally classical and modern language of form, offers an ideal space for this purpose.

Yilmaz Dziewior
Bregenz, September 2014